

REB approves 900 storybooks for primary schools

Kigali, Rwanda—Tuesday, November 20, 2012

The Rwanda Education Board (REB), with support from the USAID-funded Literacy, Language, and Learning (L3) Initiative, has added over 900 storybooks to its list of approved reading materials for primary schools. Last week, REB finished delivering the list to schools across the country so that they can order storybooks for their libraries and classrooms. Schools will receive their orders by March of next year.

"Now that we have more books, I think schools will have a wide choice," says Augustin Gatera, director of languages and humanities at REB's Curricular and Pedagogical Materials Department. "Hopefully they will begin equipping libraries, resource centers. Children will be having more books to read."

The storybooks are the result of a public tender that REB released in April, which called for submissions of storybooks, flash cards, alphabet charts, and audio stories for primary school as well as text books for secondary. Of the 900 storybooks, over 200 are in Kinyarwanda, 15 times more than before the tender. The majority of Kinyarwanda storybooks are for primary grades 1 to 3, meaning that, for the first time, primary schools will have Kinyarwanda storybooks to support beginning readers at the earliest stages of their literacy development.

The tender classified storybooks into 21 reading levels, gradually increasing in difficulty and complexity. L3 Technical Director Norma Evans provided detailed technical specifications for each level and trained interested publishers. According to Evans, it is essential that children read books at their reading level.

"If children are given books that are beyond their reading level, they can't read them. They quickly become discouraged and this translates into a negative perception of their reading abilities and of reading in general," says Evans. "Giving children books that match their reading levels allows all children to be successful readers and to develop confidence in their reading abilities."

All submissions to the tender were independently evaluated by three education specialists according to Evans' specifications. Only books that met the technical criteria were placed on the approved list, ensuring that schools will not only have more books, but better ones.

In order for these books to truly have an impact, REB is urging teachers to allow children to take these books home. "Sometimes books are there in schools but are kept in stores," says Anathalie Nyirandagijimana, a specialist in pedagogical norms at REB. "If those books are distributed to children, it will improve certainly the reading skills of our learners."

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